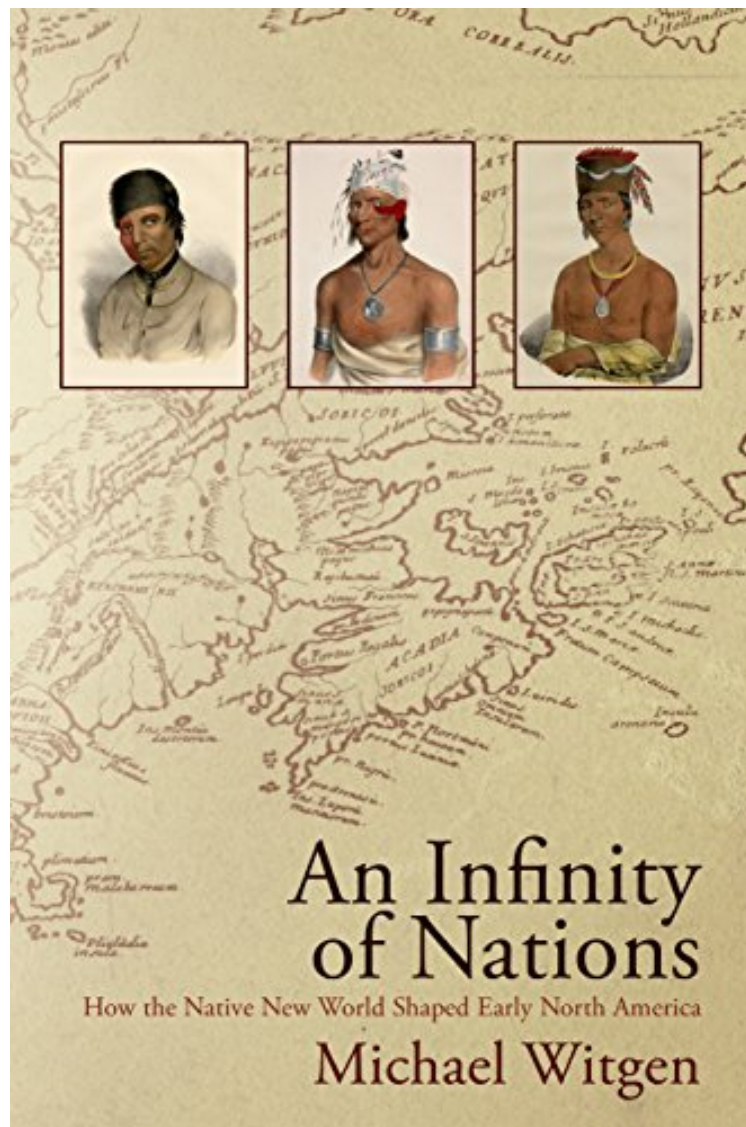


[Library ebook] An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America (Early American Studies)

An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America (Early American Studies)

Michael Witgen

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Michael Witgen : An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America (Early American Studies) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America (Early American Studies):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A seminal work, a tour-de-force, a compelling, ...By Family

ResearcherA seminal work, a tour-de-force, a compelling, elevating, enlightening read. Witgen is unremitting as he wrests us from complacencies. We gradually absorb the reality of a 'new world' that was not fundamentally European. Thanks to Witgen, his colleagues and their students, we are now beginning to appreciate the richness of our heritage.3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Fantastically written and well-researched.By Adam WatsonProvides a much-needed perspective on European colonial expansion. Possibly the best work to date that grapples with Native perspectives in the making of the New World.4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Great buy!By JoshPerfect condition! Received it quickly. And the book, bogged down a bit with thick details and attention to linguistics, wrangles together a good source base and richly engages "middle ground," Native American "empire," and North American "borderlands" studies; this is a smart addition to R. White, D. Richter, and K. DuVal, P. Hmlinen. Thanks!

An Infinity of Nations explores the formation and development of a Native New World in North America. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, indigenous peoples controlled the vast majority of the continent while European colonies of the Atlantic World were largely confined to the eastern seaboard. To be sure, Native North America experienced far-reaching and radical change following contact with the peoples, things, and ideas that flowed inland following the creation of European colonies on North American soil. Most of the continent's indigenous peoples, however, were not conquered, assimilated, or even socially incorporated into the settlements and political regimes of this Atlantic New World. Instead, Native peoples forged a New World of their own. This history, the evolution of a distinctly Native New World, is a foundational story that remains largely untold in histories of early America. Through imaginative use of both Native language and European documents, historian Michael Witgen recreates the world of the indigenous peoples who ruled the western interior of North America. The Anishinaabe and Dakota peoples of the Great Lakes and Northern Great Plains dominated the politics and political economy of these interconnected regions, which were pivotal to the fur trade and the emergent world economy. Moving between cycles of alliance and competition, and between peace and violence, the Anishinaabeg and Dakota carved out a place for Native peoples in modern North America, ensuring not only that they would survive as independent and distinct Native peoples but also that they would be a part of the new community of nations who made the New World.

"An important and original history, An Infinity of Nations should lead ethnohistorians to reinterrogate other North American regions for indigenous categories of social and political organization that may have been more important, and more fluid, than Europeans understood."Ethnohistory"Witgen implores readers to reimagine native peoples as agents of their own destiny well into the nineteenth century. As such, An Infinity of Nations invites scholars to reconsider crucial tenets of early American history."Journal of American History"An Infinity of Nations is a bold and altogether original examination of Indian-European relations, indigenous social formation, and European imperialism. Though centered on the western Great Lakes and northwestern interior in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the book travels far and wide geographically, chronologically, and thematically to Iroquoia in the East, Hudson Bay in the North, the prairie-plains in the West, and Ohio Country in the South. Witgen also reaches deep into the past to place the events of the late 1600s in a long historical context of evolving indigenous North America, and he takes the story into the early nineteenth century, showing how, as it expanded westward, the United States collided with a long-evolving and fully formed indigenous world. A sophisticated study of a different kind of colonial world where kinship ties, mediation, small gestures, and right words signified and brought power."Pekka Hmlinen, author of The Comanche EmpireSelected by Choice magazine as an Outstanding Academic Title for 2013About the AuthorMichael Witgen is Associate Professor and Director of Native American Studies at the University of Michigan.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Chapter 1: Place and Discovery in AmericaIn the spring of 1660 the Anishinaabeg converged on a central location below Gichigamiing (Lake Superior), the largest freshwater lake in North America. They came to a village at another smaller lake, Odaawaa Zaaga'igan (Ottawa Lake, which the French designated as Lac Courte Oreilles). This lake connected two important watersheds, one flowing north into Gichigamiing, the other southwest into the headwaters of Gichi-ziibi (Mississippi), a massive river system that flowed from the heartland of North America into a large ocean gulf that framed the southeastern shoreline of the continent. This village was situated at a crossroad of sorts. It linked the vast grasslands that spread across the interior of North America to the watersheds and lakes that connected the center of the continent to the eastern seaboard (Figure 1). The Anishinaabe bands that lived at the west end of Gichigamiing sent word to the peoples of these regions other Anishinaabe bands, the Wyandot (Huron to their east, Muskegowuck-athinuwick (Lowland Cree) peoples from the north, and the Dakotas to their west that they planned on hosting a ceremony in the spring. In the spring people arrived at the Anishinaabe village burdened with the things they valued most in the world. They carried food, animal skins, and peltry fashioned into clothing. They brought wampum, beaded belts made from purple and white shells exchanged as a signifier of alliance or a declaration of war, and used as a ritual gift to mourn the dead. They brought trade goods manufactured by the Europeans who had settled on the east coast of North America. They also carried the bones of their dead ancestors. These things represented the building blocks of a potential exchange network that would link the

peoples together in an alliance relationship. This was why they had come together. The Anishinaabeg of Gichigamiing wanted to end the bitter warfare between their community and the Dakota and the Muskegowuck-athinuwick, and replace it with a new relationship. They wanted to end the cycle of raiding and counterraidering that killed off their young warriors, and saw their women and children taken into the villages of their enemies as slaves. To do this they needed to find a way to transform their enemies into allies. In the world of the Anishinaabeg there were two categories of people: inawemaagen (relative) and meyaagizid (foreigner). The Anishinaabeg needed to find a way to transform their enemies into relatives. To create this new relationship they borrowed a ceremony from the Wyandot, a form of the athataion, or a Feast of the Dead. This Feast of the Dead lasted fourteen days; each filled with dancing, games, gift exchanges, ritual adoption, and arranged marriages between members of the different bands in attendance. The ceremony culminated in a massive eat-all feast where the living dined alongside the corpses of their dead relatives, consumed all the food in the village, and then gave all of the goods that they had accumulated to their guests as gifts. Following the feast, the dead were interred in a common grave. The Feast of the Dead ceremony inscribed the past with a new meaning. With the bones of their ancestors joined together, the Anishinaabeg, Muskegowuck-athinuwick, and Dakotas could imagine a shared history of kinship and alliance. Their pasts were buried together. Their futures, in the form of their children now intermarried, also joined them together as an extended family. Enemies literally and ritually had been transformed into allies by being made into kin. They were now inawemaagen, relatives. In this way, the Feast of the Dead represented a rebirth. It represented the possibility of uniting a landscape divided by violence and warfare. Relatives shared a sense of responsibility for one another. Along with this responsibility came rights to trade, hunt, fish, harvest rice, and generally sustain the life of the community, all of which were negotiated among the composite parts of a social formation that operated as an extended family. The social relations of production for any Anishinaabe community involved the recognition of reciprocal rights and responsibilities between the different beings (human and other-than-human) occupying a given territory. Alliance expanded the scope of these relationships to include new people and spaces, effectively expanding the physical and social world of the Anishinaabeg. In effect, the Feast of the Dead refashioned the rights and responsibilities that defined the relationship between people and landscape. It linked the peoples from the north and south shores of Gichigamiing together, and tied them to the people from the region of Gichi-ziibi, the enormous river valley that drained the forests and grasslands of the interior west. The political and economic integration of these peoples represented a significant reconfiguration of power and space. Joined in alliance, the combined social formations of the Anishinaabeg, the Muskegowuck-athinuwick, and the Dakota possessed the ability to control the circulation of people, animal pelts, and trade goods throughout the heartland of North America. This ceremony, in other words, created an indigenous sociopolitical formation that could, potentially, rival or surpass every other power. Native and European vying for control of North America's fur trade. And control of the fur trade translated into power; the power to determine the fate of the Indians and European immigrants struggling to make their place in the New World. The New World was born of this struggle between Natives and newcomers over place and belonging, and over the rights and responsibilities owed to one another. On a continent that came to be defined by the mass immigration of outsiders, and the wide-scale displacement of the indigenous population, understanding who belonged where, and by what right, are among the most fundamental questions that can be asked or answered. This was what made the Feast of the Dead hosted by the Gichigamiing Anishinaabeg significant in 1660, and this is what makes the story of this event important now.